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Northridge council members too candid?

By James Nash

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Monday, July 14, 2003 - NORTHRIDGE -- One is a neighborhood activist who frequently needles City Hall over its failure to fix the Northridge swimming pool. Another is a stalwart San Fernando Valley secessionist who unsuccessfully ran for a Los Angeles City Council seat this year. And another is a homeowner whose speech is peppered with salty language and who admits his politics "are to the right of Attila the Hun."

The three -- Jane Lowenthal, Walter Prince and Charles Brink, respectively -- are leaders in the formation of the Northridge Neighborhood Council.

And, say city officials and some of their neighbors, they are exactly the wrong people for the job.

On July 1, the would-be Northridge Neighborhood Council became the first of the more than 70 advisory panels in Los Angeles to be rejected in its bid for official status. The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, which has certified 74 neighborhood councils from San Pedro to Chatsworth, voted unanimously not to certify Northridge.

In a special meeting Friday night, the organizers of the Northridge Neighborhood Council voted to appeal the decision to deny their certification to the Los Angeles City Council. They said they hope at least to stimulate a debate over what they consider heavy-handed meddling by the city department that oversees neighborhood councils.

"I am delighted that the Northridge Neighborhood Council, through its elected directors, unanimously voted for this appeal, and in the community's best interest we hope the L.A. City Council will help us resolve our differences," said Lowenthal, president of the unofficial Northridge Neighborhood Council.

Leaders of the Northridge group say City Hall is punishing them for speaking out on issues -- from the shut swimming pool to the quality of city services in their community. They say the city wants to impanel neighborhood councils that are pawns for City Council members.

"The thing they don't like about Northridge is that we want to be a voice for the people, not a voice for City Hall," said Brink, the vice president of the Northridge Neighborhood Council in formation. "They don't want us to ask why the hell the pool isn't open or why it takes 12 minutes to get a cop out here."